

Bahrain Chamber of Commerce and Industry Outlines Plan For Recovery

Manama, March 22 -- Bahrain's Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BCCI) outlined a plan yesterday to revive the economy of the island nation. The document stressed that there are immediate bright spots on the financial horizon for Bahrain.

"These businesses are badly hit by the political impasse," the BCCI said. "These enterprises should benefit from the oil windfall, with price rising by more than 30 per cent, and the GCC's financial package for Bahrain," it added.

The plan offers a roadmap for the private sector to restore growth to Bahrain. A key facet of the blueprint would be waiving fees on private sector businesses for a grace period. This would include fees paid to the Labour Market Regulatory Authority, the social insurance and other parties.

Another tactic the BCCI suggested would be to set up a special fund to help private sector companies hit by the unrest. The Central Bank of Bahrain would be encouraged to help commercial banks to avoid any stagnation. The banks would in turn be encouraged to provide more incentives to the private sector.

Under the proposed stimulus plan, new government projects in Bahrain would be launched and funding of infrastructure and service schemes would be increased.

The proposed blueprint has been submitted to His Royal Highness Prime Minister Prince Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa and His Royal Highness Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, Crown Prince, Deputy Supreme Commander and Economic Development Board chairman.

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Source: Gulf Daily News

Contact: Rose Sager

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Bahrain On The Mend: A Strike Is Called Off and 60,000 Students Return to School

Manama, March 23 -- Bahrain's largest trade union yesterday canceled a nationwide strike after receiving assurances that the safety of its workers would not be compromised.

The General Federation of Bahrain Trade Unions (GFBTU) made the decision after meeting with Shura Council chairman Ali Salch Al Salch and Labour Ministry officials.

"We discussed several key issues workers are facing for the past few weeks, with their safety on top priority," said GFBTU secretary-general Salman Mahfoodh. "The officials said they would work towards removing all barriers that would stop any worker from resuming their duties. Based on this we decided to call off the strike and urge all workers to resume their duties today."

The federation initially called for a strike on February 20 after the Bahrain military was deployed on the streets to quell anti-government protesters.

But it was called off the same day after the tanks pulled out.

The latest strike was called at the start of last week in solidarity with protesters.

"During the meeting, we agreed some recommendations made by Labour Ministry officials mainly assuring that workers will not be targeted by anyone when they go to work," said Mr Mahfoodh.

The federation, which represents more than 60 trade unions, was also concerned that workers would have had their salaries docked for participating in the strike.

"Employers should not deduct wages during this period," said GFBTU assistant secretary for the private sector Karim Radhi.

In other developments yesterday, approximately 60,000 students returned to school following days of closures.

Ministry officials were out in force throughout the day ensuring normal services resumed at government schools.

Education Minister Dr Majid Al Nuaimi, Under-Secretaries Shaikh Hisham bin Abdulaziz Al Khalifa and Abdulla Al Mutawa and assistant under-secretaries Nassar Mohammed Al Shaikh and Shaikha Lulwa bint Khalifa Al Khalifa were among those who carried out inspections in more than 30 schools around the country.

In the Southern and Muharraq Governorates, the ministry said attendance levels for pupils and teachers were normal. In other Governorates, attendance was lower but was expected to return to normal in the coming days. Education officials expect near capacity by Sunday.

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Bahraini Ambassador Welcomes Secretary of State's Positive Remarks Regarding The U.S. Friendship with Bahrain and Calls For National Dialogue

Paris, March 19 -- U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton today emphasized the commitment of the United States toward Bahrain and her hope for the success of the National Dialogue in the island kingdom. She also affirmed the "sovereign right" of Bahrain to invite security forces from allied countries, and stated that the U.S. shared the goals of the GCC regarding Bahrain.

Since the uprising in Bahrain began, Bahrain's Crown Prince has called on all parties to engage in a dialogue to reconcile differences. Secretary Clinton said the goal of the United States is "a credible political process that can address the legitimate aspirations of all the people of Bahrain."

Ambassador Houda Nonoo appreciated the Secretary's comments that dialogue should unfold in a peaceful, positive atmosphere that ensures that students can go to school, businesses can operate and people can undertake their normal daily activities. Said Ambassador Nonoo, "The government of Bahrain has consistently maintained that differences should be resolved peacefully around the negotiating table, but unfortunately, the opposition has not responded to this offer and instead has chosen to continue along the path of violence and disruption of normal life in Bahrain. It is my government's belief that wisdom will prevail among the opposition and they will come to the negotiating table to resolve all differences peacefully."

Source: Embassy of the Kingdom of Bahrain to the United States

Contact: Art Swift, 202-744-9045

This has been issued by Qorvis Communications on behalf of the Embassy of the Kingdom of Bahrain to the United States.

Banks and Stock Exchange Reopen in Bahrain

Manama, March 18 -- The government of Bahrain Thursday reopened the stock exchange, several banks and the central bank, a sign that normalcy is returning to the island kingdom's financial markets.

Despite Manama's financial center being blocked by police, the stock market resumed trading at its emergency location.

The stock exchange closed Wednesday after Bahrain declared a three-month national safety period. A spokesman for the exchange said it could reopen at its Financial Harbor headquarters on Sunday.

Some banks and financial services also reopened specific branches yesterday. They were closed after intense demonstrations by opposition forces earlier in the week.

Standard Chartered, the English bank with 500 employees in Bahrain, reopened two of its seven branches in the Kingdom yesterday and intend to open the rest soon, Bloomberg News reported. One of HSBC's four branches also was opened to customers yesterday.

Bahrain's central bank also resumed operations. Local banks use the central bank to provide basic banking services such as check clearing and bank transfers.

The central bank announced that it is prepared to cooperate with all the banks in Bahrain to assure continued operation, as it meets the needs of customers and institutions.

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Source: Bahrain TV

Contact: Rose Sager

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Bahrain TV Reports: Protestors Burn Their Own Tents

Manama, March 16 – Bahrain TV is reporting that protesters at the Pearl Roundabout in the capital of Bahrain have burned their own tents, with no police nearby, contrary to other media reports.

Video captured by Bahrain TV Wednesday shows peaceful demonstrations at the Pearl Roundabout, devoid of police presence. Opposition forces claimed that government-backed security forces burned their settlements without provocation. Bahrain TV confirms in a televised news story that protesters burned their own tents in the critical area of Bahrain, and these fires were not caused by police.

It was not immediately clear why the protesters burned their own tents or why they blamed police, Bahrain TV said. Opposition protests have entered a second month in the archipelago of Bahrain, home to the U.S. Navy's 5th Fleet.

Video of the news event is available here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tLWMR-1ATi8>

Source: Bahrain TV

Contact: Rose Sager

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British Expatriate Gives a First-Hand Account of Events in Manama, Repudiates BBC's Coverage of Protests in Bahrain

MANAMA (March 19)- The British Broadcasting Company's (BBC) reporting on the recent events in Bahrain has been "appalling" and "one-sided" says Nigel Goddard, a Cambridge-educated British engineer living in Bahrain since 1981. In a note to the BBC, Goddard describes that the BBC's reporting from Manama has failed to address the sensitivities of Bahrain's complex culture and people. Supporting the Bahraini government's response to the social disruption, Goddard stated that "such upheaval has to be reined in."

Mr. Goddard argues that the BBC has not shown a measured account of the protests in Bahrain and has failed to give a fair account of the Bahraini government's response. BBC failed to perform "due diligence in the rush to go live" and misreported actual events to "feed shock-hungry viewers," he says in his letter.

Regarding the perception that the government used excessive force on protesters, Goddard notes that, "no tanks were used in Pearl clearance - only a van-sized APC at crawling speed. Helicopters over Pearl were filming, no air-raid, no 'onslaught'."

Goddard details the misrepresentation that Bahrain's current social upheaval is derived from sectarianism among the people. He says that BBC reports "lump all Shia together and depict the problems here as a Sunni-Shia split." He furthers his point saying, "This is not what most Shia at Pearl were saying to visitors who wanted to hear their view: sectarianism is expressly not what they wanted to raise."

Goddard also depicts the lawless tactics used by certain group of protesters. "Pearl diversions first caused gridlock, then we had multiple roadblocks across our biggest highway using truckloads of sand, concrete blocks and roadwork barriers," he said. "Imagine this in London - but we don't have hundreds of alternative routes," Goddard said, describing how relatively few protesters caused "paralysis in a small country."

With regard to allegations that Salmaniya Hospital was blocked off by troops, Goddard refutes the widely held perception saying he witnessed, "one tank, several police vans and army personnel outside the entrance, filtering traffic to pass slowly."

Mr. Goddard also argues that BBC should not juxtapose Bahrain with other situations of unrest exhibited in Libya, Egypt, Tunisia, or Syria. "Bahrain is a relatively progressive Arab state already on the road to a democratic future," he says, noting that BBC reporting inflames "an already impassioned situation."

Mr. Goddard closes his note to the BBC saying, "We feel your recent shallow, one-sided coverage is effectively inciteful... we hope you tighten up your journalism to what millions still expect."

Source: Bahrain TV

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